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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate School.

Thesis.

The Ethical and Social Influences of the Liturgical Plays.

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(A. B. McKendree 1912)

In partial fulfilment of requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

1915.

*Approved, E. Charlton Black.  
May 24, 1915.  
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## SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is not to trace the origin and the development of the Drama, but to write of the place of the Liturgical Plays in the early drama, and of their influences on the individual, the community, and the national life of their time.

The Liturgical Plays were, as their name suggests, plays developed from the common liturgy used by the clergy in the churches at the time of their origin. The liturgy was the written forms prescribed for reading alternately, by the clergy and the laity at the time of the observances of the sacraments and other formal or ritualistic services observed by the churches. Some of the most important of those occasions were the Eucharist, the Birth of Christ, and the Resurrection. The liturgy, itself, was very impressive, and was rendered more so when responsively read by the clergy and the laity.

The time came when the clergy felt that the sacraments, and the liturgical services of the church might become more effective if they were made more real and true to life. They, accordingly, took up the task of developing a liturgical drama. They were more or less guided by the ancient Greek Drama which was classical in its forms. The liturgy possessed decided ad-



vantages for dramatic activities, for it contained the best dramatic material that could be obtained. Back of the liturgy was the inexhaustible mine of dramatic wealth, the Old and the New Testament.

After the clergy had developed a liturgical drama their next task was to give it a trial in the churches. This they did behind closed doors, and the attendance was restricted to members of the Church. The Holy Eucharist was the first of the liturgical observances placed on the church stage. The actions and the scenes in this solemn sacrament left lasting impressions on the minds of those devoted worshipers. As time and experiment went on the liturgical plays proved themselves not only a success, but of great spiritual value to all who saw them.

The liturgical plays brought large increases in the church attendance. The time soon came when all the available space within the building was occupied by men, women, and children. The demand came to have the church plays given outside of the building, in the open. After some hesitancy upon the part of the Church, the plays were transferred to the open. They were first given on a raised platform at the church door; later they were presented from stages in the churchyard.





The transition to the open brought, at first, decided advantages. The attendance enormously increased. All classes of people felt at liberty to attend. The clergy and the laity had before them that multitudinous throng, and with it the golden opportunity of impressing whole communities at a time with the great truths of God.

The influences that emanated from these church dramas were far-reaching in their ethical and social aspects. The individual, the community, and the whole national life were, in time, touched by the great lessons represented in the liturgical plays. The mighty forces which brought about the Renaissance were shaped, if not born, in the church drama of the ninth and tenth centuries. This one event, if there were not others to be cited, shows what power of influence was contained in the early church drama. It is with a sigh of regret that we must so soon see this powerful and successful agency for good take its departure from the hands of those who devised it into the hands of those who changed its holy use into selfish and commercial purposes -- the guilds. There we leave the plays just where they left the Church.



ANALYSIS.

I. The Liturgical Plays.

- (1) Their origin.
- (2) Why called "Liturgical."
- (3) When and where played.
- (4) Fragments of Liturgicals.
- (5) Transition of the Liturgical Plays.

II. The Ethical Influences of the Liturgical Plays.

- (1) On the religious life.
- (2) On the moral life.
- (3) On the political life.
- (4) On the educational life.

III. The Social Influences of the Liturgical Plays.

- (1) On the individual.
- (2) On the community.
- (3) On the nation.



THE ETHICAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES OF THE LITURGICAL  
PLAYS.

Development.

Mimic action is as old as the human family. It had its origin in the first man. As it began in Adam, so it begins in each individual. Mimic action is very comprehensive in its scope. From it arises every other action and expression. We find it manifested in all animal life as well as in the higher order of man. Beginning with the small child we have expressive action long before word expression. The clumsy movements of the child serve as its means of expression. There is meaning in his first vocal utterances. The actions are as significant as the utterances. Little emotions or excitements tend to intensify these utterances and actions. Anger and jollity are expressed by different sets of actions;- the convulsive, sharp, and prolonged cries, accompanied by quick, jerky, and emphatic gestures of hands, arms, and feet, and oftener the entire body indicate his displeasure. The child's pleasure or happiness employs the smooth and gentle actions, and the cooing utterances. The child is a natural imitator. He makes his first appearance on the great stage at his birth. This may





very well be the first scene. It is with this scene that the "immortal Shakespeare" begins life's dramatic actions, and shows us their successive stages through life:

"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
And then the whining school boy, with his satchel,  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,  
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." (1)

There is no life without its drama, and dramatic actions.  
We are all actors and actresses, if not professionals.  
Every life has its comedy or tragedy. It may be acted out in total obscurity, but just the same, whether

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(1) "As You Like It." -- Act II. Sc. VII. 11.139-166.





whether the public sees or does not see it, the fact remains true. We are not all Hamlets, Orlandos or Macbeths, but we belong to the same great stage upon which they portrayed life's great realities. We are surely playing our parts, but as to the efficiencies or the inefficiencies of our playing is the vital question. Out of this rich mine of peculiar worth came the drama. It was not born full grown, and symmetrically developed, but like the new-born babe, it required careful nursing and constant attention.

The drama, doubtless, arose from that natural love of imitation peculiar to man, and from the childlike liveliness with which a simple narrator loves to recount anything which he has heard or seen. By a careful study of the rise of the drama we find that the Old Testament contains numerous instances of the dramatic dialogue, as in the book of Job; and of lyric poems placed in dramatic connection, as Solomon's Song; but there is no instance in Hebrew literature of the existence of the drama properly so called. The Hindus have an early dramatic poetry, but, unfortunately, this poetry only dates back to a time when the intercourse between Greece and India was close and frequent. Then it is to Greece alone that we must look



for the invention of the drama, and to Athens, in particular, for its perfection. But, even in Athens it was originally exhibited only at a few festivals of a single god, Dionysus. It appears that there can be no doubt that the origin of the drama is to be sought for in the enthusiasm attendant on the worship of Bacchus. The ancient Greek writers tell us that the drama originated in a choral song; and Aristotle says (1) that it had its origin in the singers of the dithyramb, the lyric poetry sung in honor of Bacchus. It has been supposed by some that the drama originated in the pantomimic dances, but if this supposition be true, the dramatic art, like every other, was only purified from extraneous mixtures. Even the origin of the word "tragedy" has been disputed, although the inventor of it, Arion (580 B.C.), the celebrated dithyrambic poet, is known. Tragedy (*tragōdia*, from *tragos*, a goat, and *ōde*, a song) is said to have been taken from the fact of the old dramas being exhibited when a goat was sacrificed, or because the actors were clothed in goatskins. Comedy (*kōmōdia*, either from *kōmōs*, a revel, or *kōme*, a village) signifies, literally, either the reveller's song or the village

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(1) Poetics, vol. IV.



song, from the practice of strolling players publicly exhibiting their dramatic skill about the streets. Thespis (536 B.C.) introduced the regular dialogue into the choral representations, and joined a person to the dithyrambic songs, who was the first actor. Phrynichus (512 B.C.) used this single actor of Thespis for the representation of female characters, although with him the lyric element predominated over the dramatic. We do not find any further improvement of importance introduced into the tragedy before the time of Aeschylus.

In the year about (580 B.C.) the comedy was revived by Susarion, who travelled about through Greece, ridiculing, from a small moveable stage (a shadow of the mediaeval cycles), the follies and vices of his time. Tragedy, from its first recognition, was deemed worthy, by reason of its superior gravity and staidness, to entertain the refined inhabitants of cities; while comedy from the outset, from its riotous fun and jollity, was judged more in harmony with the rustic habits of the country people. In the course of time comedy made its way into the cities, and through the efforts of distinguished comedians, like Phormes, Magnes, Crates, Cratinus, Eupolis, Aristophanes, and others, it won the notice of Athenians.

Through the years that remained, in Greek tragedy, until its close, we find such men as Aeschylus,





Euripides, and Sophocles, contributing to the drama, that which brought it to its highest level in Greece. For with these three great poets, Greek tragedy may be said to close. With the close of the premediaeval drama in Greece, we must look to the Romans for its next appearance.

"When, in the earlier centuries of the Christian era, the law and order, the social forms, refinement, and art of classical civilization were submerged by the flood of barbaric invasion, it was only natural that the ancient drama should likewise disappear. Greek tragedy had, indeed, long ago degenerated into rhetoric and ethical bombast; and Roman comedy had yielded, as a popular amusement, to the brutal and spectacular orgies of the Coliseum, the obscenities, and ineptitudes of dancers, mimics, and jugglers. But among the cultivated the masterpieces themselves were still a source of delight; and might yet, had Roman civilization been suffered to work out its own reform, have served as models for the recrudescence of the ancient stage. Under the barbarian rulers of the dismembered empire, they persisted merely as manuscripts in one and another ecclesiastical library or religious muniment-room of Europe." (1)

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(1) Gayley's Plays of our Forefathers. p. 1.





Gradually, following the decline of mediaeval drama, the Christian phase of the drama, which, later, gave rise to the modern drama, began to take form. As has been previously mentioned, the Old Testament was found to contain dramatic material which strongly appealed to minds dramatically inclined. The New Testament abounded in splendid material for the drama. The two great sources, taken together, furnished the mighty foundation for the Christian drama, which was beginning to take dramatic form, even as early as the second or third centuries after Christ. But it was much later before we find what may really be called the Christian drama. It is certain that these early Christian plays were based on the classical drama, as The Passion Play, Querolus, and Comedies of Hrotsvitha. The first of the Christian plays were held in connection with the various feast days observed, as the four Sundays in Advent, the Circumcision of our Lord, Twelfth, or Old Christmas, the latter ones present the Epiphany of Christ to the Gentiles, the beautiful story of the Star and the manifestation of the Babe to the three kings of the Orient, the Nativity, Easter and Holy Communion. These plays were followed up by the Saints' Plays given in adoration of the saints. "Most of these festivals, in spite of their different degrees of antiquity, have given impetus to some pageant or other of the cyclic miracles by which the drama was revived for the populace of the middle ages; or they have con-



tributed both material and occasion to one or another of the numerous independent plays of saints, of which, though few have survived, records remain in municipal documents or in literary reference at the present day."(1)

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(1) Gayley's Plays of our Forefathers, pp. 12-13.



## I. THE LITURGICAL PLAYS.

"The meaning attached by the Greeks to the word liturgy, and illustrated by historical associations which would have made it memorable even had it never come to form a part of the Christian life, was that of a service performed by an individual or by an association of individuals in behalf of the community to which they belonged. This expression was appropriated by the Christian Church, and applied by her to the public performances of a religious rite of paramount significance.(1)

In the Christian Church the plays centered, at first, about the liturgy, or liturgical services. One of the first liturgical plays was that of the Eucharist. This was given in connection with the celebration of that holy sacrament. At this sacrament none but believers, and specially instructed ones, could attend. This strict observance, of course, excluded the unbelieving, and mere spectators. It is needless to say that such a service, if possible, made more intense by the presentation of the dramatic side of it, must have been deeply impressive to the audience, and the participants. In the observance of the Eucharist, it required, of the believers, the highest concep-

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(1) Ward's History of English Dramatic Literature, p. 29, vol. 1.





of the Christian faith to conceive of the Real Presence in the elements of the bread and the wine. To them it was a mystical thing, far from being understood. In later years, the Western Church applied to this part of the Eucharistic sacramental or liturgical observance the name mystery. The name mystery, in the Western Church became applicable to any of the great festivals of the calendar.

In scope, the Liturgical Plays extend from the passing out of the Church Festivals and the Saints' Plays, to their transition from Church to Guild. Throughout their period of existence they were controlled by the clergy, and confined to the church buildings. The Roman Catholic liturgy, to some extent, contained dramatic matter. The priest and laity chanting or reading alternately, reading the liturgy; the ornaments, the decorations, solemn processions, and mimic actions all tended toward the drama. The reading was in Latin, which was read in rhythmical manner. The dialogues were based on the Biblical texts, or on certain portions of the liturgy. Gradually, these liturgical dramatic dialogues developed into plays, presented by actors who were either clergymen or laymen. Usually, the plays were performed on the pulpit platform inside the church house, but later they were performed in the naves of the church. The players were all men, or men and boys.





From "The Concordia Regularis" of St. Ethelwold, drawn up between 965 and 975 for ceremonials of the Church in Winchester, we still have a description of the most dramatic of these early rituals -- the celebration for Good Friday. Mr. Gayley, in the "Plays of our Forefathers,"<sup>(1)</sup> quotes the following from Chamber's "Mediaeval Stage:" "St. Ethelwold directs that on Good Friday all the monks shall go discalceati, or shoeless, from Prime 'until the cross is adored.' In the principal service of the day, which begins at Nones, the reading of the Passion according to St. John and a long series of prayers are included, then a cross is made ready and laid upon a cushion a little way in front of the altar. It is unveiled, and the anthem 'Behold the wood of the cross' (Ecce lignum crucis) is sung. The abbot advances, prostrates himself, and chants the seven penitential psalms. Then he humbly kisses the cross. His example is followed by the rest of the monks and by the clergy and congregation." This gives us some idea of the ancient custom of Creeping to the Cross. Immediately proceeds the reading, by the priest, the ritual of St. Ethelwold:

"Since on this day we celebrate the laying down of the body of our Saviour, if it seem good or pleasing

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(1) Gayley's Plays of our Forefathers, pp. 15-16.



to any to follow on similar lines the use of certain of the religious, which is worthy of imitation for the strengthening of faith in the unlearned vulgar and in neophytes we have ordered it in this wise. Let a sepulchre (or likeness of one) be made in a vacant part of the altar, and a veil stretched on a ring which may hang there until the adoration of the cross is over. Let the deacons who previously carried the cross come and wrap it in a cloth in the place where it was adored. Then let them carry it back, singing anthems, until they come to the place of the monument, and there having laid down the cross as if it were the buried body of our Lord Jesus Christ, let them say an anthem. And here let the holy cross be guarded with all reverence until the night of the Lord's resurrection. By night let two brothers or three, or more if the throng be sufficient, be appointed who may keep faithful wake there chanting psalms."

"The ceremony of the burial, or Depositio Crucis, is followed by the Missa Praesantificationum, the Good Friday communion, with a host not sanctified that day, but specially reserved from Maundy Thursday; and there is no further reference to the sepulchre until the order for Easter day, itself, is reached, when St. Ethelwold directs that, before the bells are rung for Matins, the sacristans are to take the cross and set in a fitting place."

The above is esteemed valuable because it very clearly shows us the ecclesiastical ceremonial gradually taking on the dramatic form by means of the pantomime and interjected song. That which follows, from St. Ethelwold's ritual for the third Nocturn at Matins on Easter morning is of even greater historical interest, for it displays an advance within the ceremonial to dramatic dialogue itself:



"While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren vest themselves. Let one of these, vested in an alb, enter as though to take part in the service, and let him approach the sepulchre without attracting attention, and sit there quietly with a palm in his hand. While the third respond is chanted let the remaining three follow, and let them all, vested in copes, bearing in their hands thuribles with incense and stepping delicately as those who seek something, approach the sepulchre. These things are done in imitation of the angel sitting in the monument (the sepulchre), and women with spices coming to anoint the body of Jesus. When, therefore, he who sits there beholds them approach him like folk lost and seeking something, let him begin in a dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing: "Quem quaeritis (in sepulchro, O Christicolae)." And when he has sung it to the end, let the three reply in unison,

'Jesum Nazarenum (crucifixum, O caelicolae).

So he -

Non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat.

Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit a mortuis.

At the word of this bidding let those three turn to the choir and say,

Alleluia, surrexit Dominus.

Alleluia, surrexit Dominus hodie.

This said, let the one, still sitting there, and as if recalling them, say the anthem,

Venite et videte locum.

And saying this, let him rise, and lift the veil, and show them the place bare of the cross, but only the cloths laid there in which the cross was wrapped. And when they have seen this let them set down the thuribles which they bare in that same sepulchre, and take the cloth and hold it up in the face of the clergy, and as if to demonstrate that the Lord has risen, and is no longer wrapped therein, let them sing the anthem:

Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro,  
and lay the cloth upon the altar. When the Anthem is done let the prior, sharing in their gladness at the triumph of our King, in that having vanquished death he rose again, begin the hymn,

Te Deum laudamus.

And this begun, all the bells chime out together."(1)

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(1) Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, II, 15, 308.





Here, we can easily see, though the presentation is still by dialogue of speech and song, that dramatic action and form are growing into the liturgical drama. In the Christmas Trope it is even more noticeable. The following example is taken from (1) Gayley's "Plays of our Forefathers," which is a copy of the original liturgical. The Christmas Trope is of the quest of the Shepherds, and begins: "Quem quaeritis in praesepe, pastores, dicite?" On Christmas day let two deacons be prepared clad in dalmatics, and behind the altar let them say: (2)

"Whom seek ye in the manger, Shepherds, say?  
Let two choir boys reply:

The Saviour, Christ the Lord, a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, according to the word of the Angel.

Then the deacons:

The child is here, with Mary his mother, concerning whom in prophecy Isaiah foretold: 'Lo a Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son.' Now, proclaiming, tell that he is born.

Then the cantor shall say in a shrill voice:

Alleluia, Alleluia. Now we know in truth that Christ is born on earth; of whom, we sing, saying with the prophet, Christ is born."

This trope is from a St. Gall manuscript which Mr. Chambers assigns to the XIth century. It is found

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(1) Gayley's Plays of our Forefathers. p. 24.

(2) Translation by Gayley.





Wherever females appeared in the play their parts were performed by the men players dressed as women. No doubt this was awkwardly done, but actors, and not actresses had to do it. We are not to think of professional stage actors presenting to an immense audience some popular comedy or tragedy play, but we are to think of crude players from the farms, the shops, the stores, the offices, and courts, taking the various parts in sacred and religious services rendered in the house of the Lord. The audience, at the beginning of these plays was composed of Church members, all others excluded. This was the custom governing the Eucharist, but it is doubtful if the rule applied to any other of the liturgical plays.

The earliest forms or expressions contained in the Liturgical Drama are very few and rare. Only fragments or tropes of them now remain. Perhaps, one of the fullest preserved is the Easter Play. This happy event was put into dramatic form and served as the climax of joy at the triumph over death and the grave. They regarded as altogether too sacred for dramatic presentation the Crucifixion. Previous to the Easter Play the Holy Week of Passion was solemnly observed, and with the dawning of Good Friday they began preparation for the presentation of the Resurrection. The interior of the church was appropriately decorated and arranged for this happy event.



also in a brief Officium Pastorum which, in the XIVth century formed part of the Christmas service in Rouen<sup>(1)</sup>, and it was followed, on Epiphany, by an Officium Trium Regum much more elaborate.

The following is an excerpt from one of the fragments of a liturgical play given within the walls of the church. Taken from an original manuscript<sup>(2)</sup> :

[Officium Pastorum]

"Pastores erant in regione eadum vigilantes et custodientes gregem suum. Et ecce angelus Domini astitit inxtra illos et timuerunt timore magno.

[The star appears and the angels sing:]

[II. Pastor.] We Tib!  
 [III. Pastor.] Tell on!  
 [II. Pastor.]..... the nyght.  
 [III. Pastor.] Brether, what may this be,  
                   Thus bright to man and best?

[II. Pastor.] ..... At hand.  
 [III. Pastor.] Whi say ze so?  
 [II. Pastor.] ..... Warand.  
 [III. Pastor.] Such silt was neuer sene  
                   Before in oure Iewery;  
                   Sum merueles wil hit mene  
                   That mun be here in hy.

[II. Pastor.] ..... A sang.  
 [III. Pastor.] Ze lye, bothe, by this lizt,  
                   And raues as recheles royes!  
                   Hit was an angel brizt  
                   That made this nobulle noyes.

[II. Pastor.] ..... of prophecy.  
 [III. Pastor.] He said a barn should be  
                   In the burgh of Bedlem born!  
                   And of this mynner me,  
                   Oure fadres fond be born.

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(1) Du Meril. Orig. Lat. p. 147.

(2) Manly's Pre-Shakesperean Drama I, pp. XXVIII-XXIX.



[II. Pastor]..... Jewus King.  
 [III.] Pastor. Now may we se the same  
           Euen in oure pase puruayed!  
           The angel nemed his name--  
           "Crist Saueour" he saied.  
 [II.] Pastor ..... not raue.  
 [III.] Pastor.     Zone brightnes wil vs bring  
           Unto that blisful boure;  
           For solace schal we syng  
           To seke oure Saueour.

Transeamus usque Bethelem, et indeamus hoc  
 verbum quod factum est, quod fecit Dominus  
 et osten dit nobis.

They follow the star.

[II.] Pastor ..... to knawe.  
 [III.] Pastor.     For no-thing thar vs drede,  
           But thank God of all gode;  
           This light euer wil vs lede  
           To fynde that frely fode.

They enter the stable and adore the child.

[II.] Pastor.     Now wat ze what] I mene.  
 [III.] Pastor.     A! loke to me, my Lord dere,  
           Alle if I put me noght in prese!  
           To such a prince without [en] pere  
           Haue I no presaud that may plese.  
           But lo! a horn-spone haue I here  
           That may herbar an hundrith pese:  
           This gift I gif the with gode chere,-  
           Suche dayntese wil do no disese.  
           Fare-wele now, swete swayn,  
           God graunt the lifyng lang!  
 [I. Pastor]     And go we hame agayne,  
           And make mirth as we gang!

Here, we have the dialogue without ehe inter-  
 jected song, but the dialogue is still nearing the drama-  
 tic form which it reaches under the direction of the Eng-  
 lish drama.





The liturgical plays, proper, had their origin from the tropes which were more crude than the plays of the liturgy. The plays of the liturgy, probably, had their beginning early in the Xth century, or perhaps, even a little earlier. In Davidson's "English Mystery Plays" <sup>(1)</sup> we find this statement: "As early therefore as the Xth century, maybe earlier, there were developed at various places on the continent at least three Christmas plays: the Shepherds, the Magi, and the Innocents; and these plays had so far left the ceremonial trope that they were already acted outside of the church and apart from the service. The common material for these and succeeding plays is, of course, the scriptural account; but it is most interesting to observe that the scriptural participants in these early plays -- Herod, scribes, wise men of the East, Herod's messenger, soldiers, mothers of Israel -- have already developed the features that characterise them in the popular cycles of the later middle ages; the messenger fawns, the Herod blusters, the soldiers counsel, the counsellors tremble, here as there. Even the fictitious personalities of the English popular miracles of the XIVth and XVth centuries are already upon the stage. The midwives of the Chester and so-called Coventry cycles,

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(1) Davidson's English Mystery Plays, pp. 50 et seq.





and Herod's son of the cycle of York, figure in the plays of Orleans and Freising, and in the common source of both, perhaps as early as the year nine hundred."

From the above quotation, and many other authoritative sources we gain some knowledge of the characters developed in the early tropes and liturgical plays. There can be no doubt of the influences and marks of these early plays giving forth evidences in the later, or middle age drama.

As the liturgical plays developed, the more popular they became, until there was a demand for larger seating capacities than the church buildings contained. For some time this demand had been felt, but the clergy would not consent to a departure from the church enclosures. Finally this restraint upon the part of the clergy gave way, and the plays were given on a stage, joined to the church building, immediately in the front of the main entrances to the edifice. This move of the plays out into the open was considered, generally, a great advantage in more than one way. At least, the non-church people, at once felt more freedom than they had possessed within the building. For some time, after this new arrangement, the interiors of the buildings were still utilized for some special parts of the plays. For instance, in one play, the response of



God's voice comes from within to the belated virgins who knock at the door, only to find it closed, and they, themselves, shut out. In a very short time the players felt that it would be more convenient, to move the plays entirely away from the church buildings, and this they did. They, this time, transferred them to the churchyard (which also included the burial grounds), where they remained until they passed from out the hands of the clergy.

With the coming of the plays into the churchyard, came also greater multitudes of people of all kinds, and from everywhere within reach. One can imagine the great throngs of people as they were gathering from the neighboring towns, villages, country nooks, and farm houses. Some came on foot, some on horse-back, some in wagons, carriages, and in any convenient way possible. The idea was to get there. Once there, they would risk getting back home. It must have been a very motley throng, in every detail. Great crowds of little children, the young folks, the married folks, fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandsons and granddaughters, and last of all, the dogs and the cats which were in the habit of following their masters and mistresses to church or other public gatherings. It must have required all the available



space possible for standing, and hitching room for this great gathering of horses and vehicles. We can imagine that neighborhood of animals and vehicles surrounding the entire churchyard. There certainly was more or less consternation, at times, among the horses and donkeys, and also heated disputes and contentions among the dogs as they undoubtedly felt increased responsibility for faithful watching over their masters' possessions amid that unruly, and, at times, excited gathering.

Around the stage, in the churchyard, were gathered the people to witness the scenes that were to be played. It is a good-natured throng of neighborhood folks, met together, some for religious instruction, some for social enjoyment, and others for sundry reasons. There was good opportunity for ethical, and social development. Even the children found much social merriment and intercourse in innocent amusements, such as hiding, and seeking behind the grave stones in the churchyard. The moonlight nights, the grave stones, deep, and flitting shadows must have afforded never-to-be-forgotten impressions on the minds of the playful children.

One other feature that indirectly attached itself to the throngs which gathered was the company of venders and food sellers. They, indeed, found a





vary profitable source of business in supplying the people with all kinds of refreshments. They did not locate immediately on the church yards, but closely adjacent to them. This feature, however, did not prove helpful to the plays as it might have proved. It had a tendency to attract the mischief-makers, and to create too much disturbance. In fact, the general tendency of reverence for the plays was already beginning to wane. The out-door freedom brought with it too many attractions. The clergy could no longer shut out the world, and they found themselves unable to command the greater throngs, as they did the smaller ones inside the buildings. They realized they had made a mistake that could not be easily remedied. The plays had gone out of the church houses, and were rapidly slipping from the hands of the clergy. Too many comical parts were being introduced into the sacred liturgies. The result was the plays passed out of the control of the church authorities into the hands of the guilds. This transition took place about the year of twelve hundred. We read that, in the year of twelve hundred and twenty, the Resurrection Play, evidently of the kind ordinarily acted in the church, was acted in the churchyard. It is very reasonable to believe that this play was written by the secular clergy, not the people, and that, if any assistance in acting was



given at all, it was given by the people to the clergy, and not vice versa.

The guilds, or craft guilds, as they were sometimes called, were the men who took over into their control the plays which had been given by the secular clergy. These guilds were made up of farmers, shop men, carpenters, wool-combers, and other men who knew, practically, as little about a play as a first class actor or actress would know about a farm or a factory.

With this transition from church to the craft guilds we mark the passing of the Liturgical Plays. To be sure, the same plays were developed, and worked over, and presented by the guilds, but they were not the Liturgical Plays. The passing of the Liturgical Plays, again marks the ushering in of the English Cycles. But it is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss the nature and development of these later plays, but to briefly summarize what the Liturgical Plays contributed, ethically and socially, to man.



## II. THE ETHICAL INFLUENCES OF THE LITURGICAL PLAYS.

The Liturgical Plays had, for their supreme object, the ethical, and the religious training of man. The Church had vital teachings to impart to the multitudes. She must get the Word of Life to every living soul. This was the one great, incumbent duty. It was imperative. The command of God could not go unheeded. The Church was earnestly at her task. She toiled and groaned under her increased duties, and worried conscience. The eternal message required a faithful and impressive presentation. Great, and greatly important was the Church's commission. She knew her best and most faithful work would be inefficient, but her best was demanded, and she was ready and willing to grant it. The Church was keenly conscious of the inefficiencies of former methods to meet the present responsibilities. It was at this time the clergy began to think and to talk of presenting divine truths in a new way -- in a dramatic form. For centuries the Church had heard the message publicly proclaimed by the instrument of the human voice and by speech. This agency had achieved wonders, and could never be dispensed with, but probably, might, in this new manner, be enabled to do more.





The idea of dramatizing the sacred things of God's word was not to weaken their strength or lessen their beauty, but to more clearly show their strength and beauty to man. The method would be more attractive, and at the same time more effective and impressive on the hearers. Every possible precaution, in rightfully arranging the sacred material for a play, was taken. The most essential and vital scenes from the New Testament were selected for the church stage. The Clergy were to be the actors, and the plays were to be given in the church houses. The new plan was well arranged, and specially devised for placing the emphasis on the ethical and religious phases of life.

The new plan of setting forth divine truth was completed. The next move was to set it in motion. This was done, and very admirably done. It drew multitudes that never had attended divine worship. As to how much they were benefited by these services one can not well know, but some approximate estimate may be had by investigating a few of the early plays given. For our assistance in acquiring this bit of interesting knowledge, the following extracts from original plays are here inserted. The first is an



extract from Hilarius' "Suscitatio Lazari." "To perform it, says a rubric, there are necessary: 'Lazarus, his two sisters, four Jews, our Lord, and his twelve Apostles, or six of them at all events.' Very manifestly, the action proceeds under the simplest external conditions, and the dialogue is restricted to the narrowest, or absolutely necessary, dimensions. The first scene or 'movement' discovers Lazarus sick in bed amidst the lamentations of his sisters, who despatch the four Jews sitting by his side to seek the counsel of 'the Supreme Physician, the King of Kings.' They betake themselves to the Saviour, Who promises that the sickness of His brother shall not be a cause of death to him. But on their return the messengers find Lazarus dead, and Mary and Martha lamenting him. Each sister chants a series of four stanzas with a French refrain.

Mary's runs thus:

'Hor ai dolor;  
Hor est mis frere morz;  
Por que gei plor (this is why I weep).'

Martha's (with more penetrating feminine pathos):

'Lase, chative!  
 Des que mis frere est morz,  
 Porque sue vive?'



Before the sounds of these wailings have wholly ceased, voices are heard from a group assembled in another part of the scene: 'The Jews of late sought to stone Thee, and goest Thou into Judaea again?'

'Lazarus sleepeth; I go that I may wake him out of sleep.'

So, though the disciples are full of fear, they proceed on their way; and as they are in the midst of the path, the Master is heard explaining to them the difference between the sleep which is, and the sleep which is not, death. Arriving at the house at Bethany, they are met by the heart-broken Martha, who, in stanzas of which the verses alternate between Latin and French, expresses both her grief and the hope inspired by the Saviour's presence, whom Martha beseeches to intercede. She intercedes:

' Si venisses primitus,-  
                   Dol en ai,  
 Non esset hic gemitus;-  
                   Bais frere, perdu vos ai.  
 Quod in vivum poteras,-  
                   Dol en ai,-  
 Hoc defuncto conferas!  
                   Bais frere, perdu vos ai!'

In Mary, hope has become belief; and to this belief He responds without hesitation. They pass together to the sepulchre where Lazarus had been laid, and without delay the action reaches its climax in the loosing of Lazarus. Whereupon, turning to his deliverer, the





man who has been raised from the dead exclaims:

'Thou art our Master, our King, our God! Thou shalt blot out the guilt of Thy people; what Thou orderest is straightway accomplished; Thy kingdom shall have no end.' Thus, the play being over, the transition is natural and easy to the Te Deum or the Magnificat, intoned, as is directed by Lazarus, that is, by the priest who has assumed the part, according as the play may have been introduced in the service at matins or at evensong."<sup>(1)</sup>

It is very easy to see how much more impressive was the narrative made by a stage or dramatic presentation. It made the truth real and strong. The masses who looked upon these scenes were more deeply moved to accept their great teachings because, like Mary, their sight became belief. Such views and impressions were too deeply ingrafted on the mind to be easily erased or forgotten.

One very happy feature of the plays was the very excellent variety of characters chosen for the *dramatis personae*. In the fragments of the old liturgical plays we find represented on the stage such Bible characters as Daniel and Belshazzar, the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the Raising of

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(1) Ward's History of English and Dramatic Literature.  
Vol. I. pp. 38-39.



Lazarus, and the Easter Play which was the Resurrection of Christ. The actors, who were the clergymen, presented the great moral lessons with rare skill and pious gravity. Great care was taken not to over dramatize the characters, but to present, in the best possible way, their true characters, and how well they represented what they advocated in their time. They clergy manifested good judgment in the choice of representative men and characters of the Bible whose lives either exemplified Godliness or worldliness. In Daniel we have highly exemplified the man of righteous purpose who dared to live true to it. In Belshazzar we have a worldly despot who brazenly enforced his despotism.

For further illustration of the plays let us take "The Wise and Foolish Virgins." The extract is taken from a translation of the various languages in which the play is written. "We may, if we will, imagine to ourselves the performance of this liturgical mystery as taking place in the Abbey of St. Martial at Limoges. The Foolish Virgins are arranged on the one side of the entry to the choir, the Wise on the other side. The precentor and clergy chant an invocation by way of prologue; from the lectionary the Angel Gabriel bids the Virgins await the Heavenly



Bridegroom; whereupon there begins the simple action of the piece. The Foolish Virgins have fallen asleep and their oil is wasted: when they awake, they in vain entreat the Wise Virgins to share with them their store. They are met by a refusal and bidden buy oil from the merchants sitting behind their stalls at the other end of the nave. Along its entire length the Foolish Virgins pass to buy them oil; but the merchants have none to sell them, so that with loud lamentations they have to make their way back to their original station at the entrance to the choir. Here they kneel down in terror; for since their departure the Wise Virgins have entered in, and from the scene a Voice makes answer to their cry of despair -- or a Mighty Presence advances to warn them against entering in their turn - "Verily, I say unto you I know you not; and they are consigned to everlasting torments. Black figures, gruesome to behold, bear them away; and down in the nave the congregation, half believing in the reality of what it has seen and heard in the dim light and amidst the sound of many voices, returns to its accustomed exercises of prayer and praise."<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Ward's History of English Dramatic Literature, I, pp. 35-36.





The ethical influences emanating from such dramatic plays as this one referred to for illustration, acted on the Church, itself, and on the non-Church people. In the first place the Church, from the plays, gained a clearer understanding of what it believed and taught. Through the past years the clergy had read and expounded the very same parables, and the same teachings, but when they were acted out before them a greater comprehension of the true teachings was gained. The characters of the parable were made more real. The beautiful marriage scene, the coming of the bridegroom at midnight, the five virgins who had their lamps well filled with oil, and the five virgins who had their lamps, but they were empty lamps. The wise virgins going out to meet the bridegroom, the bridegroom and his guests entering into the guest chamber of the bridal house. The door is closed, and the marriage ceremonies proceed. The five foolish virgins return, and knock at the door, but to their eternal sorrow, the Voice from within says: "I know you not." From this presentation before their very eyes the Church understood how very true and grave were the teachings of Jesus Christ. The



Church further realized more clearly its own peculiar responsibility. Again, the Church derived great encouragement to do greater works. The enlargement of the crowds of people in attendance at the services lent greater enthusiasm throughout the entire Church life. The members were gladdened by the great throngs that heard and saw the wonderful teachings of the Divine Father. In the next place the Church realized the extended opportunity to greater fields of activity. It had the motley throngs at its own door. These multitudes, perhaps, could not have been brought there had it not been for the dramatic presentation of the great truths and teachings which, when they saw and heard, caused them to become more serious minded. In this way the Church extended its influences far out into the life of a nation's people.

The non-Church people, through the religious plays, had been privileged to enjoy a course of instruction in the teachings of the Founder of the Christian Religion. It can not be absolutely determined how far-reaching had been the influences for good on the thousands who came within the touch of these services. If men, women, and even children had been induced to learn more of what they had seen and heard, it was certainly



not injurious to them. In the Wise and Foolish Virgins the older folks saw the lesson of danger in procrastination. There can be but little doubt that for weeks after having seen such vivid scenes, the farmer at his plow, the smith in his shop, the woodman in the forest, and scores of other groups of men at their respective toils, still vividly saw, in their minds, the scenes of the resurrection, the birth of Christ, the great day of judgment or any other scenes impressed upon them in these sacred performances. In the Resurrection play the teaching of the immortality of the soul impressed men with the fact of a future life. The Day of Judgment play let men see into the great teaching of divine justice as one of the attributes of God. This same illustrated parable also opened back the mighty doors that screen from sight the eternal existence or life in the eternal world. The Birth of Christ play opened for universal man the door of hope and immortality. Such wide-reaching discourses upon the ethical, the religious, and the social natures of man did not fail to find lodgment in the heart of man.

Not only the individual life was lifted up, but with it the entire community and communities. It was much like the far-reaching influences of a great revival meeting. If men had not espoused religion,





itself, they had become to a great extent moralized. Honest principles, clean living, humanitarianism, and corrupted political issues broken down, were some of the immediate results of the ethical influences of the Liturgical Plays. It is also safe to say that the great national life was rightly or ethically influenced by the plays. The ethical influences had put a great restraint on all the corrupted practices throughout the sections where they had been given. As a telling result the masses of the people were drawn into a closer relationship with religion and right principles. This closing statement I do not apply beyond the limits of the Liturgical Plays. Beyond their limits, I very greatly fear that much to the contrary might be truthfully said.



### III. THE SOCIAL INFLUENCES OF THE LITURGICAL PLAYS.

There can be no great gatherings of the masses of men without some degree of social development. We are told that man is a social being. It is his nature to be on friendly and speaking terms with his fellows. His social functions are cultivated, largely, by his contact with the people whom he meets. It is easy enough to distinguish differences between the social qualities of men. In the first place human nature is very different, and often social endowments are not equally proportioned. Location or environment has much to do with man's social development. There is, for instance, a vast difference between the social culture of the city bred man who has been constantly in touch with the social societies, clubs, and throngs of the street, and the man who is just as good naturedly and otherwise endowed, but who has been reared in the back woods, far from the great active social life. If this isolated man should be transferred to the city, I am sure the influences of the city life would soon be apparent in his life. It might be for the good or it might be for evil.

In the very early days of the English religious drama, the emphasis was placed in a three-fold sense, of the ethical, of the religious, and of the



social influences. In the Liturgical Plays the religious element was particularly emphasized, but that does not mean the social element was eliminated. Religion without social culture is no religion. The religion of Jesus Christ strives to cultivate the best social qualities in man. A very important factor in the early religious plays was that which made people act naturally, and it is still true when we are natural, just ourselves, we are much happier and more at ease. One of the first things done in the early religious play was the making of a bit of fun to cause a good social feeling among the people. This was not always done, for it was not always necessary. The crowds, when in the churchyards assembled quite early, and had some time for visiting with one another, or getting acquainted, just as the case might happen to be. In this way, many new acquaintances were made, and good social feeling prevailed. When the play was being performed by the actors, the people, gathered about the stage or seated on benches or other seating devices, gave reverent attention. But when the play ended, they had much pleasure in freely speaking to one another about the play, in general, or about the parts that mostly impressed them. It is not probable that they remained





together long after the play, but returned to their  
 homes in various towns, villages, and communities.

The fact that thousands of people from a very large neighborhood assembled at certain seasons for religious worship rendered in an extraordinary manner served to promote friendly national feelings. The Church had found its power of usefulness in the much neglected field of social service. Of this social service Professor Ward says:

"Nor shall we forget what the church services and church festivals -- what the churches themselves, with their peace and security, their brightness and their grandeur, illustrated and enhanced by all the arts in combination with one another -- were to the period of which we are speaking. Not only were they, as in a measure they remain to this day, associated with the cardinal events of private and of public life; but to large masses of the population the sacred edifice was the center of their social as well as their religious life." (1)

These public worships gave opportunity for the Church to lay the foundation of sound social principles upon which the entire superstructure of the social system could be erected. This opportunity was quickly seized by the Church, and at once she wisely and discreetly set to her vitally important task. It was not easy to inculcate these fine principles upon all, but the best people readily accepted them and put them into daily practice. In the various neighborhoods led on by their best

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(1) Ward's History of English Dramatic Literature. I, p. 31.



citizens, the social order, in its best condition was gradually received.

The religious life, and religious worship was developed from a monotonous tone into a variant service. The Church outgrew the old notion that her works must be confined within her walls. She had begun to realize that one of her chief functions was to help people enjoy life. Religion had found its other strong arm. With it the Church led every man to behold the things of every other man, and for each one to be interested in the works, and the possessions of others. This one basic principle sought to establish a common interest in the welfare of others, and to relegate selfishness. This underlying principle was not then, neither is it now, the erroneous idea of communism or socialism. It taught a common interest, which is scriptural, but it did not teach the possession of all things in common. The Liturgical Plays were instrumental in fixing an individual ownership, and at the same time a common concern in the things of others. This social factor emanating from the Church plays, sent the multitudes back to their various homes better neighbors, better friends, and better citizens. Peace and contentment nestled down in their prosperous homes and communities. One can almost imagine



another Grand Pré (as in Evangeline) scattered throughout the English isle. The influence of the plays upon the churches was conducive to a wider scope of usefulness in their respective parishes. The clergy and laity were more united in their respective duties and labors. They were agreed that the Church must perform duties other than the sacerdotal functions. The Church further realized that man's social qualities should be developed under the direction of the Church rather than under the influences opposed to the religious life. If the Church could have retained the control of the plays the social life would have been ideal. The theatres of ill repute, or no theatres, likely, would have been known had the plays remained within the Church.

Educational interests received very valuable assets from the religious plays. The whole system of school life, under the social influences of the plays, took on new life. The idea of efficient service, socially rendered to man became a fixed standard of attainment. This standard still prevails in the present educational system. Even after the plays had passed from the Church, their moral and social influences, for a long time, were apparent in the educational world. Colleges, universities, and lower schools found inspiration from the Church plays to enable them to introduce more social





functions into their curriculum, and social societies. Under renewed social influences of a wholesome nature school life revived. In the home the mothers and fathers had received this quickening, social touch directly from the Church, and infused the same into their children, who carried it with them into the schools. This relationship between the home and the school was a very ideal and harmonious one. The community and Church back of the social life in the school made a very desirable condition in any community. Directly the schools returned the rich assets with increased value. The young people, when they had finished their school courses, returned, as trained and helpful servants, to the community, and lent their influences toward developing the highest and best type of men. High morals, refined social functions, as etiquette, gentility, and politeness of manners, were some of the products of the influences of the Liturgical Plays. Such conditions induced greater school attendance. The spirit of social culture in the school, as well as in the Church, had found its place, and was gladly received into its rightful place.

The political life was to some degree benefited ethically and socially by the far-reaching influences of the Church plays. The direct, and the indirect benefits of the training, and the social attainments acquired



in school life under the influences of the Church drama, contributed much to the national life. The political realms were greatly improved by the men whose lives had come under the immediate influences of a broader training. Those men were better students of mankind than were their predecessors. Formerly, the emphasis had been placed on efficient book-knowledge. The theoretical had been the one thing in the preparation for efficiency, but now, the practical claimed equal importance in the curriculum of efficiency. The national interest was gradually transferred to these men of broader vision. The nation at large felt the new touch of a master hand. It was much like the touch of a master pilot as he seizes the steerage wheel and swings his ship into the right channel.

These men of the new school gradually infused their ideas into state affairs, and within a short time the national government assumed new and greater proportions. The splendid freedom that had come to light in the social and ethical world began to manifest itself in the national life. A new light was beginning to dawn. The old ways of thinking and doing were beginning to lose their grip on the nation. Pagan ecclesiasticism had become repulsive through its greed



for dominancy. It had closed the doors against enlightenment, and forbade its communicants social intercourse with their neighbors of opposite religious persuasion. Monachism was a clear manifestation of the tendency of Roman ecclesiastics toward the social and ethical rights of man.

With the men of the new thought in national power, came the gradual, but sure separation of state from the dark and narrow confines of a sacerdotalized and commercialized ecclesiasticism. This entering, wedge caused long and loud opposition upon the part of monachism, but it gave opportunity for the inception of a new day, which dawned amid these lowering and thick gathering clouds, but the day dawned which saw its Wyclif, its Tyndale, its Luther, and its scores of early, ardent advocates of freedom of learning and religion. Yes, the day dawned and its sun, far up in the bright heavens, is still shining brighter and clearer, and must shine in, at last, the eternal day -- the everlasting light -- the never-ending Renaissance. All hail to those youthful, stalwart pilots into whose clear young eyes the strange light first shone. All hail to the powerful influences of the Liturgical Drama Plays of the early Church, for in them was born the spirit of freedom, of learning, and noble progressive ideals which





lead on and on, even unto a perfect day. Today the greatest republics of earth owe much of their independence, freedom, and religion to the ethical and social influences which emanated from these early Church plays in those far away distant ages. Then hail to the little Liturgical Drama of the IXth and Xth centuries, though least among the thousands of dramas, yet out of it came forth the principles of social relationship, ethical law, and freedom of educational and religious opinion.



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